



Using the Farm Bill to Conserve Important Wildlife Corridors

The issue: Growing interest in the conservation of wildlife corridors, particularly in the Rocky Mountain west, provide a unique opportunity for the Obama Administration to use provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill to work with landowners, conservation groups and political leaders to conserve and restore key habitats in a way that will resonate with the public. We provide recommendations below on how to do that.

Background: There is growing interest, particularly in the intermountain West, to protect wildlife migration corridors for pronghorn, elk, mule deer, carnivores, and other species. Protecting these corridors will benefit many fish and wildlife species, not just charismatic ones. The Western Governors' Association launched a "Wildlife Corridors Initiative" in 2007 and issued a 2008 report calling for a major effort to conserve the corridors that link key wildlife habitats. Increasingly, those corridors are threatened by energy development, roads and transmission facilities, urban growth, and other factors.

Much of the WGA report focuses on the public lands of the West, but it also acknowledges the important role that private landowners can play in restoring or maintaining the ability of wildlife to move across the landscape as part of seasonal migrations, dispersal to nearby habitats, or climate-driven shifts in range. Indeed, the report highlights the Farm Bill as a potential source of funding for corridor conservation efforts. What the report does not do, however, is examine closely how Farm Bill programs can be administered most usefully to accomplish its objectives.

Suggested Actions: The Obama Administration should consider a focused effort with western states to target provisions in the 2008 Farm Bill dollars to protect and restore key wildlife corridors. Here are policies that the Administration should pursue in partnership with the Western Governors, sportsmen, conservation groups and others:

- Target Conservation Reserve Program dollars to key wildlife areas through development of State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) programs, targeted continuous enrollment programs, and use of appropriate plantings and management in corridor areas.
- Work with NRCS to place increased emphasis on using Farm Bill working lands incentive programs to restore habitat, remove and redesign problem fencing, and take other stewardship actions targeted to protect and restore important corridors for wildlife.
- Work with states to develop wildlife corridor conservation projects under the new Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative.
- Target easement acquisition under the Grassland Reserve Program, Wetland Reserve Program, Farm and Ranch Protection Program, and Healthy Forest Reserve Program to threatened lands within corridors.

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